

# How Hard Should I Exercise?

Increasing physical activity improves health and fitness. It is also key to success with weight management. What is easy for one person is hard for another. Listen to your body. You are the best judge of how hard you should exercise. Start slowly with easy activities and build to those that are harder. Here are some terms you are likely to hear.



## Moderate-Intensity Physical Activity

- This is how hard you need to exercise for health benefits.
- Physical activities that make you breathe a little harder and make you sweat lightly.
- Activities you feel you could do for up to 45 minutes. This does not mean that you have to do the activity for this long just that you feel you could.
- Examples might be brisk walking, slow cycling, dancing, hard house/yard work.

## Vigorous-Intensity Physical Activity

- Physical activities that make you breathe hard, makes your heart beat fast, and makes you sweat.
- Examples include running, aerobics classes, swimming laps and racquet sports.

Use the “Talk Test” or the “Borg Scale” on the next page to help you decide if you are exercising at the right intensity.



# How Hard Should I Exercise?

**Talk Test:** If you are exercising at a moderate intensity, you should be able to carry on a conversation comfortably while still exercising. If you cannot carry on a conversation comfortably, you are exercising at a vigorous intensity. If you are just starting, begin with moderate-intensity activities.

**Borg Scale:** Use this scale to rate how hard you are exercising. Aerobic activities, like walking and cycling should be done at level 13 (somewhat hard). Strength activities, like lifting dumbbells and pushups should be done at levels 15-17 (hard to very hard). You can gradually make activities harder as you become more fit. Activities that used to be hard will become easier over time and earn a lower score compared to when you first started. For example, slow walking on level ground may be a level 13 effort for you in the beginning. As your fitness improves, it may take brisk walking up a slight hill to get to that same level 13 effort.

The Borg Category Rating Scale		
Least Effort		
6		
7	very, very light	
8		
9	very light	
10		
11	fairly light	*****
12		Aerobic Training Zone
13	somewhat hard	*****
14		
15	hard	*****
16		Strength Training Zone
17	very hard	*****
18		
19	very, very hard	
20		
Maximum Effort		

